

I've read *The Shame of Going Back*
perhaps a dozen times,
appreciating Lawson's knack
of probing wounds through rhymes.
Today my latest browsing brought
an unexpected thrill,
occasioned by a vagrant thought:
the shame of standing still.

Depends upon each circumstance
and options that exist.
When peers go chasing rainbows, chance
their luck with coin or fist,
the cautious mate who stays behind
might well need cheering up
from being sneeringly assigned
humiliation's cup.

A poster during World War One
had bellowed *I Need You!*
so if a target dad or son
held back while bugles blew
he risked a feather, craven white,
to mark his painful choice.
Had ailing wife or parents' plight
impressed with softer voice?

Mob-rule's a dark phenomenon
which sometimes clouds this land.
When ugly crowds go raging on
who makes a passive stand?
Who calls for reason, rule of law,
as slogans flail like hail?
An elder fearing race-hate war,
lest petrol bombs prevail.

A child who's urged to *have a go*
because all others do,
might swim against the current flow
of driftage termed *true-blue*.
Yet such a child ought not be shamed
for clinging to the bank,
rejecting drugs and vessels claimed
as buoyant but which sank.

We've changed a bit since Lawson's day,
though no-one's held to blame.
Tycoons who safely fail to pay
their debts don't suffer shame.
Their cups have nicely overflowed
with Bollinger and greed,
while battlers trudge the circuit road
through failure, guilt and need.

Upon the backs of battlers ride
the Canberra elite,
aloof and proud, self-satisfied,
no blisters on their feet.
They hold no fears of slinking back
to penury or shame,
for *super* beckons down the track
-- a selfish stay-put aim.

... (ends)